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OPINION

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THE RIGHT TO KNOW

SADHAN KUMAR GHOSH

THE public right to know what its rulers are up to is at the heart of the democratic system. In a century of guided, controlled, and bullied democracy, this right is more vital than even the right of dissent, and the right of non-conformism. One can only dissent from or denounce governmental skulduggery when one knows its contours. Gulag Archipelago, wherever it is established, is inevitably like H. G. Wells's the country of the blind. Perhaps not just the blind, but the deaf-mutes as well. And so, it is obvious that the right to know is today in jeopardy and is conceded only in open societies like Britain, France, West Germany, and the United States. "A Community," Rebecca West has remarked "needs news for the same reason that a man needs eyes. It has to see where it is going". Perhaps, for the same reason, these eyes are gouged out, not only in Gulag Archipelago but in its conscious imitations.

When the Press, whether pre-censored or *suo motu*, refuses to publish expressions of public discontent or even portions of parliamentary proceedings, it is not acting in accordance with its traditions and is compelled to be an anti-national instrument in the hands of power-hungry persons. In such circumstances, the Press is disregarding the noble principles enunciated by Delane of the *London Times*: "The dignity and freedom of the Press are trammelled from the moment it accepts an ancillary position. To perform its duties with entire independence and consequently with the utmost public advantage the Press can enter into no close or binding alliance with the statesmen of the day, nor can it surrender its permanent interests to the convenience of the ephemeral power of any government".

The public has a right to know about the life-style and the emoluments of the members of the top echelon in the government and to verify whether their professions of socialism, egalitarianism, and democracy are borne out in practise. This right is greater in the more destitute countries which export essential foodstuff (in some cases rice, potato and onions) to earn foreign exchange. And has not the public the right to know the actual incomes of the aforementioned V.I.P.'s and to ascertain whether they pay their taxes? Details about license-rigging and other forms of ministerial rackets should be public knowledge.

The right to know is one of the fundamental human rights, the denial of which should be taken cognisance of by the United Nations. That is why the American initiative in sponsoring a motion in the U.N. to secure the unconditional release of all non-violent political prisoners (particularly those detained without trial) deserves international acclaim. They would include the anti-apartheid demonstrators, the anti-Zionist demonstrators—and, of course, many others. Not since Byron wrote the two poems on the prisoner of Chillon has there been such an emphasis that human

freedom is indivisible. The temporary withdrawal of the motion should not discourage us. It must come up again. Now-a-days there is a proneness on the part of certain governments (Bangladesh is a handy example) to claim that their fiats and acts are their internal affairs. But the suppression of human rights, of *habeas corpus*, of the Rule of Law, cannot but be matters of common concern and cannot be the exclusive business of any State. Democracy, unlike Communism, is indivisible.

Newspapers mirror the social, economic and political patterns of their own societies. But because they also reflect aspirations that are universal they form part of an international fraternity. When newspapers reflect neither the aspirations of their peoples, nor aspirations that are universal, they cease to be what Lord Francis Williams called them, "the barometers of their time". When the barometer does not work, it is time to feel uneasy. Democracy cannot survive if the Press (or the Judiciary) chooses to be complaisant and complacent. The Press and the Judiciary should act without fear or favour. If any government, enjoying a comfortable Parliamentary majority, still considers it necessary to suspend the democratic norms, the people have a right to know the reason why. If the government is apprehensive about a conspiracy to create chaos, details of that conspiracy, supported by evidence, must be furnished. Wild charges against persons in detention, and therefore in no position to rebut them, can only have an adverse effect on the credibility of the government. And if the government has nothing to hide, it should not be nervous or jittery about the revelations of the world Press. Facts are sacred, and

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even a hostile Press will not fiddle with them. Only a panic-stricken government suppresses the publication of facts it regards as inconvenient.

Many politicians tend to forget that in a democratic society, the theoretical master of events is the people. In countries successfully disguising their fascism and in those with an open personality cult, the supremacy of the People is an illusion. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that the reporter engaged on serious affairs—nepotism, tax-evasion, license-rigging, military security, foreign relations—must be the People's eyes and ears. He must be the instrument associating People's government with People's opinion. If the people do not have the facts, the government may, according to its lights, be good, stable or efficient. But it will forfeit its claim to represent the people.

Not even the most articulate or charismatic leader can make an impact on democratic opinion without communication. He can do no more than invoke a special public attitude towards facts already make known to the public. Outside Gulag Archipelago, opinions are not wrenched from facts and are not formed *in vacuo*. Opinion is made, even created by the continual pressure of a miscellany of facts and conjectures, which vary between the banal and the cosmic, but all of which bear in some way on the human situation. How this Charivaria of information is transmuted into public opinion is a most mysterious thing, and may be compared to certain atomic experiments in physical laboratories, where effects are wrought by the effect on the mass of a constant exposure to particles, in this case facts.

The eminent writer, James Cameron, has, in his latest book described the plight of an Asian country, the Central Ministers of which draw, in salaries and perks, approximately forty thousand rupees a month, plus a free furnished house, the market rent of which could be five thousand rupees, plus unlimited travel and medical facilities. And, he adds, "their taxes are negligible". Pity, he says, nobody denounces their hypocrisy, the insincerity of their routine denunciations of capitalists, fiddlers and tycoons. It seems to me a greater pity that there is less public knowledge of their perquisites and privileges. Otherwise, there would be a juster estimate of what Ronald Segal has described as Mercedes-Benz Socialism.

Any country which emulates the Absolute Powers, particularly their love of secrecy, cannot claim to be a democracy. A government which fears independent legislators, independent judges and an independent Press may call itself what it likes, but it would be unseemly to call itself a democracy. The use of the word "democracy" in such a context is a debasement of language and against international usage. Democracy cannot co-exist with *Suppressio Veri* or the Goebbelsian lie.

In one of his last broadcasts from the B.B.C., Jacob Bronowski said: "Power is very evanescent but knowledge is a tremendously compressed charge which waits for the future and in the end, re-shapes the intellectual revolutions of the world. That is why I think knowledge is far more important than power". Maybe, that is also why, holders of absolute authority dread the dissemination of knowledge. Not a murmur is heard, not a question is asked in what Herbert Marcuse calls the pig-society.

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LORD DENNING'S JUDGMENT

A. G. NOORANI

“IT was a memorable scene, not least for the splendour of Lord Denning's oration, which I urge you to read in the fuller version that will be found on another page of today's paper. There is no judge living, and there have been few in our history, so ready to protect the citizen against the Executive and he rose to the occasion magnificently” wrote Mr. Bernard Levin in *The Times* (London) on December 5, 1975 in an article entitled “Blow the loud trumpets of victory for Us over Them in the TV licence war”.

He was referring to the decision of the Court of Appeal in *Congreve vs. The Home Office* and particularly to the judgment of Lord Denning, the Master of the Rolls. In February the Home Office announced that the colour television licence was to be raised from £12 to £18 from April 1. There was naturally a rush to renew licences before that date but the Home Office sent surreptitious instructions to post office clerks not to issue licences to holders of existing ones before April 1. Even so, some 25,000 of them managed to secure renewals and, thus, save £6. Or, so they hoped. For, before long the Home Office threatened to revoke the licences unless they paid the £6. All but 5,000 or so complied. Among those who did not was Mr. Andrew Congreve, a London solicitor. On his licence being revoked he moved the Court and lost before Mr. Justice Phillips on November 26. The Court of Appeal, consisting of three judges, unanimously reversed the decision and held the revocation of Mr. Congreve's licence to be unlawful and invalid. *The Times'* report of the case repays study.

Lord Denning held that when the licensee had done nothing wrong the Minister could not lawfully revoke the licence—at any rate not without offering him his money back—and not even then except for good cause. If he should revoke it without giving reasons, or for no good reason, the courts could set aside his revocation and restore the licence.

He said that it would be a misuse of the power conferred on the Minister by Parliament; and the courts had the authority—and the duty—to correct a misuse of power by a Minister or his department, no matter how much he might resent it or warn the judges of the consequences if they did. When a Minister was given a discretion and exercised it for reasons which were bad in law, the courts could interfere to get him back on to the right road. The Minister relied on the intention of Parliament. But it was not the policy of Parliament that he was seeking to enforce. It was his own policy. And he did it in a way which was unfair and unjust.

The story was told in the Parliamentary Commissioner's Report. The officials drew the Minister's attention to the articles in the press suggest-

ing to the readers that money could be saved by renewing licences in March. They raised the query: Should a letter be written to *The Times*? Or should an inspired question be put in Parliament to put a stop to the bright idea? But the Minister allowed the bright idea to circulate without doing anything to contradict it. And all the time he kept up his sleeve his trump card—to revoke all overlapping licences. Thousands acted on the bright idea, only to be met by the demand "Pay another £6."

The conduct of the Minister, or his department, had been found by the Parliamentary Commissioner to be maladministration. His Lordship went farther. He said it was unlawful. The trump card was a snare and a delusion. He had no right whatever to refuse to issue an overlapping licence—or, if issued, to revoke. His original demand was clearly unlawful—a misuse of power—especially as there was no offer to refund the £12 or any part of it. His later demand was also unlawful. There was yet another reason for holding the demands for £6 to be unlawful. They were made contrary to the Bill of Rights. They were an attempt to levy money for the use of the Crown without the authority of Parliament: and that was quite enough to damn them.

At the end of his judgment, Lord Denning remarked "In the course of his submissions Mr. Parker, Q.C. (Counsel for the Home Office), said at one point—and I made a note of it at the time—that if the Court



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interferes in this case it would not be long before the powers of the court would be called in question. We trust this was not said seriously, but only as a piece of advocate's licence."

But *The Times* in a blistering editorial entitled "Not Advocate's Licence" (December 6) took a graver view of the matter. "It is one of the most important things that has been said on behalf of the Government in any court in England since the reign of James II. It is telling the Judges what to do, and threatening to clip their jurisdiction if they do not. It revives the idea of a dispensing power: indeed, it asserts that when the Executive has behaved unlawfully the Executive will change the law or change the courts rather than accept the limitations of law in its own affairs."

On December 9, Mr. Parker, Q.C. made a statement before the Court of Appeal which was specially reconstituted on his request. He said, "May I first make plain beyond any doubt that neither the Home Secretary nor anyone in his department, nor indeed anyone at all, instructed me or suggested to me that I should threaten this Court in any way, or indicated to me, directly or indirectly, that if you were to find against the Home Office the powers of the court might be curtailed. . . ."

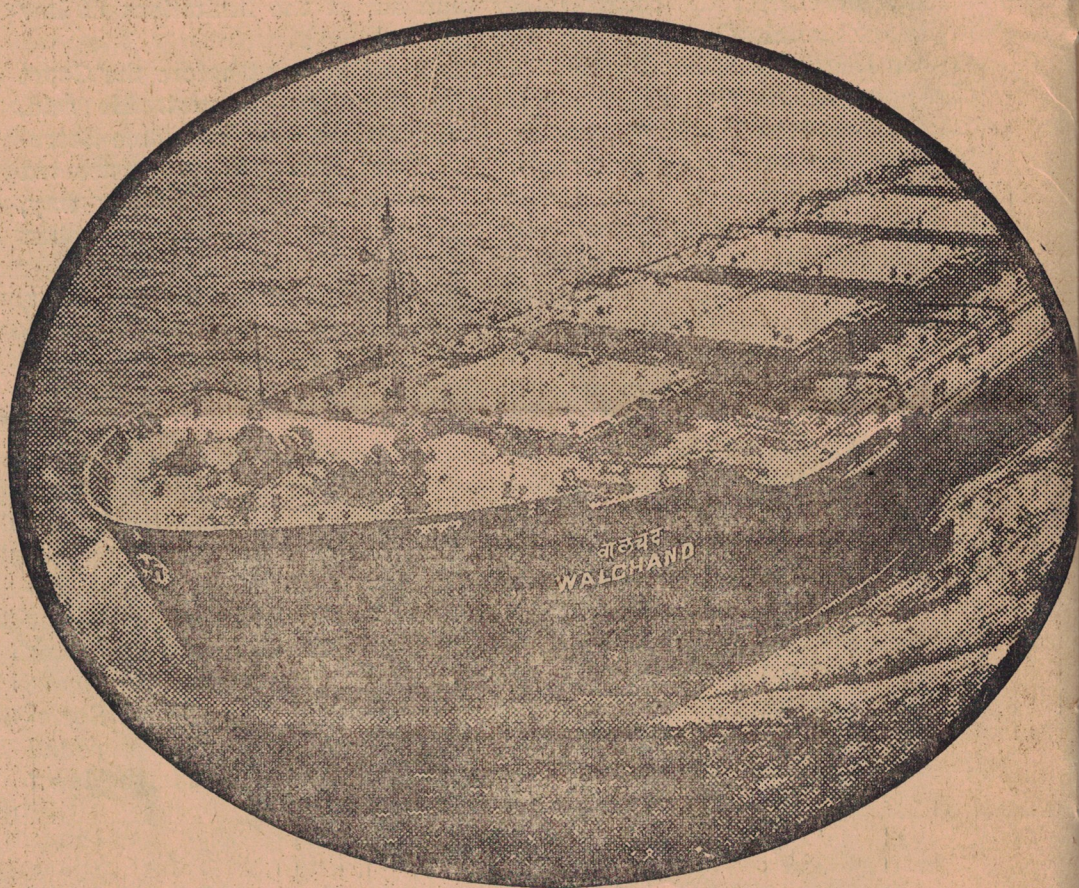
"My observation, to which your Lordship referred in the judgment, was an observation I made on my own initiative without prior consultation with, or suggestion from, anyone else." Mr. Parker said, "I intended, as I need hardly say, to make no threat. If anything I said sounded like a threat I regret it and apologise."

Lord Denning replied tersely: "We have no doubt on what was said and that my note was accurate. We are very glad to have your explanation and apology."

The Times had remarked that Mr. Congreve had played the role of Hampden and the Home Secretary Mr. Roy Jenkins "somewhat unexpectedly played the role of King Charles I." Mr. Jenkins brought the drama to a happy ending when he announced in the House of Commons on December 9 that he would not ask for leave to appeal to the House of Lords. He added that it would be unthinkable for any Home Secretary "to question the vital independence of the judiciary or to propound the doctrine that the executive is in any way above or outside the law."

"Tyranny is a fair estate, but there is no road down from it."

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A LITTLE LAUGHTER

J. B. KIRPALANI

MANY beneficent things have been done in the country in the wake of the promulgation of emergency, since June last. However, emergency in my opinion has deprived the nation of its capacity to laugh. Many situations have been created these days which in ordinary circumstances would have been capable of humourous treatment, affording a little merriment to the people. For instance, The Eastern Economist, New Delhi, changed its format by publishing on its cover the full size photo of Gandhiji, taken as he was walking in Noakhali. The publication of that picture was banned on the ground that Gandhiji appears to be walking away in the forest; it might be thought that he was walking away in spirit from India of emergency. This would have provided a fit subject for a cartoonist's brush. Again, some of the utterances of those in power appear to be capable of humourous treatment without malice by a cartoonist. More so would be the way some of the press censors exercise their unquestioned authority to disallow writings which are not critical of the way of the functioning of the authorities. They sometimes object to quotations from Gandhiji, Tagore and Jawaharlal.

Occasions for humour often arise in the economic and more particularly in the political life of the country, whatever be the kind of Government. It is therefore sad that the emergency should have deprived the people of some innocent merriment. A little laughter is an antidote for several physical and psychological ailments.

In this connection one regrets Shankar's Weekly has stopped publication. Shankar was a favourite of Jawaharlal. Lakshman's cartoons in the Times of India have lost their usual flavour and have become rather insipid. One no more hears of Puri. Also generally nowadays cartoons are missing in newspapers and periodicals. This is a great loss suffered by the country for the many advantages it has derived from the imposition of emergency.

A person lacking humour is generally considered an insufferable bore. Imagine a whole nation of six hundred million deprived of the right of indulging in humour or appreciating it with their laughter! It will be a nation of unmitigated bores. A person with a sense of humour enjoys a joke even at his own expense. Once, for a time, Shankar had not favoured me with a cartoon in his Journal. When I met him I asked him if I had become so unimportant that I did not figure in his Journal. My prominent nose and chin had not changed in dimensions.

Political life is a fruitful subject for the brush of a cartoonist. If that subject had been denied to the world famous artist and cartoonist Low, he would not have acquired the fame he did. Nobody could be more serious than the great Greek philosopher Socrates. Yet it was his humour, satire, irony and jest that converted the opulent youth of his

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country to his idealist philosophy. Socrates retained these qualities till his sad but glorious death.

Gandhiji used to say that if he lacked a sense of humour he would commit suicide. He would burst into laughter even when the joke was at his expense. I suppose he would have said that if a nation lacked the sense of humour it would be smothering its soul. I therefore do hope that the authorities will make it clear that they have no intention of prohibiting humour. The nation needs a little innocent laughter in the otherwise bleak and drab conditions of our life, in spite of the many reforms ushered in after the declaration of emergency. A little laughter will also lighten the burden that the authorities have to bear these days, even though they enjoy the vast powers which they have now clothed themselves with.

There is another complaint I have to make. That is rather personal. I used to contribute political articles to several newspapers. By that means, now that I am no more a member of Parliament, I earned an honest penny, even though the papers were owned by the tribe of capitalists. After the declaration of emergency, this precarious source of income is denied to me! I usually wrote on political subjects. No article dealing with political problems is accepted by the editors these days. I wrote an article which merely described the political situation in the country before the declaration of emergency. Unfortunately the article reached the papers after its declaration. I got it back with a slip attached to it stating, "it is regretted that the article cannot be published". I find Nayantara Saigal, a political commentator, has now taken to writing on literature. I cannot, however, change the subject of my writings at my advanced age. I know little of English literature or the literature of any other language. I do not know what to do. But this is a personal grievance and the State when it is working for the good of all, specially the backward sections of our population, cannot possibly look to the personal difficulties of an individual. India has neither old age pension nor unemployment benefits.

"Tyranny has no regard to any public action which does not also serve the tyrant's own advantage."

SOME THOUGHTS

B. VENKATAPPIAH

(Continued)

I would particularly emphasise the aspect of inter-facing or coordination. The small farmers' and marginal farmers' agencies, the programme for making available inputs such as water and electricity to the agricultural community, the schemes for extension of rural industries: all these need much more detailed co-ordination and effort than exists today. It no longer suffices to say that the bank is in the same district, taluka or block as the one in which the other programmes are operating. Much more meticulous collaboration with the rest of the infrastructure is needed in order to ensure that the farmer who has dug the well can buy the pumpset and the one who has bought the pumpset gets the electricity.

In the rural context, the most important form of bank credit is supervised credit. Supervised credit implies something to supervise. What is supervised is, for example, an individual farm plan which in turn is part of a development programme. The programme is frequently a Government programme which aims, among other things, at distribution of inputs such as seed and fertilizer and water; it being left to the bank to supply the input of credit. It is a combination—and even more, the synchronisation—of these inputs that gives the programme its developmental character. In terms of the individual, the programme resolves itself into a plan for developing the farm and increasing the income. In terms of the farm, it is the incremental income which is the basis of credit, and the progress of the plan that is the basis of supervised credit. All this means that the bank has got banking officials who know what development is taking place and how it is related to the facilities which the bank can offer.

"It belongs to everybody and is owned by nobody."

OF PEASANT SOCIETY

H. M. PATEL

GEORGE Rosen has written a book of considerable interest to us in India. The book is entitled "Peasant Society in a Changing Economy", and its sub-title 'Comparative Development in South-east Asia' indicates that the study relates to conditions obtaining in four countries, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and India. The process of economic development is affecting rural societies in all the four countries to a serious extent, and what is even more noteworthy, the peasant societies are themselves affecting the process of economic development in a significant manner. This fascinating survey shows that these societies have striking similarity, and perhaps because of this their economic development has proceeded on similar or more accurately, comparable lines. The pace of economic development has, not altogether surprisingly, varied in each case because of a number of other factors which supervene.

Among the major characteristics of what Rosen calls a peasant society are :

(a) In each country in the rural areas the family is the basic unit of organisation and therefore also tends to be the area of mutual confidence and trust. The extent of what is considered the family varies, but the degree of distrust even towards known family members increases directly with the distance from the family and from the village.

(b) Hierarchical relationships among families permeate these societies. They are closely linked with land ownership and with the religious structure of the village.

(c) These relationships are designed to protect individual families against minor disasters. In return, those protected provide labour, and a variety of social, political and religious services to the patron or the protector.

(d) There is a sense of relatively open and equal relationship among the land owning farmers in the villages. Trading is generally considered an inferior occupation and trading characteristics, such as stinginess and calculation in dealing with others, are despised. In Indonesia, this has resulted in the trade being largely in the hands of the Chinese. So also is the case in Thailand. In Philippines too trade is in other hands than of its own nationals. India has always had its own recognised trading communities, but the peasants and officials have always tended to look upon trading activities with distrust.

(e) As a corollary of these attitudes towards trading and towards outsiders, peasants dislike such economic behaviour as holding surplus cash, or investing their saving outside farming and other related activities. If the savings are not spent on land or activities related to land, they are lent to kinsmen and neighbours, or used for religious purpose

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at appropriate ceremonies. Nevertheless, all peasants have not been unduly conservative in seizing economically advantageous opportunities, and quite a few have not hesitated in adopting new technologies that may increase their incomes. The response to new technology has naturally varied in each country depending very much on the extent of finance available to the farmer. In the Philippines, the new rice varieties were readily accepted because of the ready availability of finance, thanks to a fairly widespread rural banking system besides the usual non-institutional credit sources which made it possible for land owners to obtain credit against their own land, while tenants were able to obtain credit through the land owners or with the guarantee of the land owners. In India, too, the acceptance has been most ready wherever there has existed effective rural credit system as in the Punjab.

(f) Urban centres have long existed in all these countries and have been supported by a flow of revenue from the villages. People associated with Government and cities have been traditionally looked up to by the peasants presumably because of their higher status and their education. Government employment is a goal both for those outside Government and for the educated. Business employment is in general considered inferior.

(g) Connected with this attitude of respect towards Government is the conviction that Government alone can initiate activities beyond the village to which the peasant can only respond. Simultaneously, there also prevails an equally strong belief that Government officials do not know what the problems of the peasants are, and that they cannot be trusted and, therefore, they must be kept in good humour if they cannot be avoided.

(h) Within the Government and the political parties as within a village 'patron-client', protector-protected relationships are the basis for employment and promotion. Efficiency of performance is only one criterion for determining the value of a bureaucrat. This perhaps accounts for poor performance of many Government-sponsored industries in all these countries.

(i) Political success with its concomitant of power is regarded as proof of virtue. Failure means not only inability to help one's supporters, but also a loss of virtue. Therefore, failure is a reason for shift in allegiance by supporters who are not bound by family ties. Ideologies or differences on issues play a small role in party structure, bureaucratic behaviour, or voting support.

(j) Emphasis is throughout laid in the event of disagreement or conflict upon the method of consensus. Time is not a restraint in reaching a compromise decision which may be acceptable to all.

These characteristics exist in rural areas of all the four countries in greater or lesser degree, the variation being determined by each country's particular history, its religion, and its economic resources. And they in their turn lead to differences in the functioning of each country's political system, of its Government, of its bureaucracy as also to differences in the rate of agricultural and industrial development.

India, thus, is a working democracy, though latterly with the proclamation of emergency, restraints which have been imposed are of so comprehensive a nature that one may perhaps be justified in describing it as a democracy in a state of suspense. The Philippines was a working democracy until September 1972, and is today under martial law. It is difficult to predict what kind of permanent pattern that Government may assume as and when the martial law goes. In Thailand, the number of politically minded is not large and power has always been concentrated in the hands of a few, the few today being an urbanised bureaucracy. The successful student agitation in October 1973 led to a more democratic form, but the substance still has the flavour of an oligarchy. Indonesia began with a democratic form of Government, but soon drifted towards a dictatorship. Later there was a retracing of steps and the Government now is more responsive to peoples' wishes. It will be seen thus that in this respect, too, there is a certain similarity of attitudes, approach and development. The more prosperous peasants or land owners exercise considerable influence on political leaders in each of these countries, except perhaps in Thailand, where their influence is much less pronounced.

On peasant societies of these types, the impact of modern economic ideas and new technologies was bound to be shattering. And in so far as the three countries that have become independent more recently, there has been the pressure applied by the Governments to press forward with programmes of economic development. The peasant society's code of

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conduct, its beliefs, and its prejudices offer not so much resistance as insist upon the acceptance of as much as possible of their code, their beliefs and even their prejudice, in the new organisation. It is for this reason that the progress in the direction of agricultural development as also of industrial development, and consequently of economic development generally has tended to proceed at a slow pace.

Because of the kind of attitude a peasant society in each of these countries has adopted towards its Government, Governments have tended to play a much bigger role in the entire process of economic development. Government in the case of each country has inevitably played a major role in industrial development, and laid down the policy for industrial development. The bias generally has been in favour of public rather than private sector. By a system of controls and licenses, it is Government that decides who may or may not enter production and it is Government, again, who uses supply of credit as a powerful instrument for giving desired direction to development, both industrial and agricultural.

In India private industrialists have been able to build up relatively large enterprises because they have been able to draw upon resources in terms of capital and managerial skill outside their families. In Philippines, because of the emphasis on family ownership, the size of the enterprise has not been able to grow as in India and as indeed is ideally desirable. Both in Indonesia and Thailand, there is a relative dearth of indigenous entrepreneurs. India has been free from such constraints and because of that it has, therefore, on the whole, developed industrially much faster and to a sounder extent.

The new generation includes a fair number of persons with a broader outlook and familiar with conditions in developed countries who would tend understandably to lay greater emphasis on efficiency and would favour, therefore, both professional management and a strong Central Government capable of taking speedy decisions. Although so far public sector enterprises have not done too well, a change appears to have begun to take place, because even in public sector enterprises greater emphasis is now beginning to be laid on professional management as also on profitability, as the main criteria of success, whatever the other social, political and economic objectives that are aimed at.

The continued population growth at rates as high as at any time in the past, resulting in a steady and growing increase of the labour force, as also of the number of educated people because of the emphasis that has tended to be laid on education since Independence, is creating problems of a very grave nature for Governments in these countries. In an effort to provide larger employment opportunities, various policies are being tried out, but the success that has so far attended these efforts is meagre.

The effect of the domination of rural societies has been in short to slow down the entire process of industrial and agricultural development. George Rosen suggests certain policy implications, but these, I fear, are not as sound or realistic as his analysis of the basic characteristics of these societies. Encouraging small-scale industries and reforming the

educational systems to make available a more adequate technologically qualified man power are practical objectives, even though it is doubtful if they would make a big enough impact. The adoption, however, of policies of taxation reforms and those designed to secure greater equality of incomes is likely to prove far more difficult.

This is understandable, for here we enter the field of politics whose intervention ensures that policies, which are sound rationally do not have much chance of acceptance, or if accepted, of satisfactory implementation, merely because they are sound. Even in respect of India, which has, comparatively speaking, faced its problems best of all in spite of its two major constraints, excessive population and grinding poverty, it would have fared much better, had it had the courage to face up fairly and squarely to the forces of social and religious obscurantism, and adopted policies which took note of those social and religious factors and evolved policies and programmes which the people could have been persuaded to accept, and which, therefore, would have held much greater chance of successful implementation. In fact, it is this failure to strengthen agriculture and the rural economy adequately that is essentially responsible for our predicament today. Meantime, unemployment keeps growing and the burden of poverty keeps correspondingly increasing. There is no easy solution. Only a Government composed of men who are willing to face unpopularity and even to be thrown out of office, can adopt the type of policies that are needed, policies which must yield good results in the long run, but which in the short run cannot but result in the people having to shoulder greater burdens and hardships. The much too facile solution of a dictatorship is no solution at all. Nowhere has dictatorship been able to adopt right policies in a sustained manner. A genuinely democratic government alone is likely to have the moral courage necessary, and therefore to adopt wise far-sighted policies. Such policies must be formulated around prosperous agriculture and prosperous farmers.

George Rosen has carried out a valuable analysis of conditions of the peasant societies in South-East Asia and of the process of economic development in them, but has, it seems to me, perhaps not drawn quite the right inferences.

"Man's identification with the common lot is the source and expression of social ethics."

DECEPTION IN THE NAME OF SPIRITUAL PROPAGANDA

M. M. DAVE

A NUMBER of language newspapers these days carry regular columns for enlightening their readers on what they term as "divine power", "wonders of the inner voice", "science of astrology" etc., etc. Though such columns are of doubtful utility in educating the general public, or keeping them informed on these subjects, there may not be much objection to the newspapers indulging in them, so long as the columns are restricted to propagating religion, spiritual powers, or even what the so-called science of astrology foretells according to them. In a free democratic society every one has a right to have his own religion, faith and belief and to propagate the same, however unbelievable it may appear to others. But when these columns cross reasonable limits and start propagating nothing but deception and evil, it is obviously the duty of all intellectuals to expose the falsehood and see that the people who take every printed word for gospel do not get misled.

The following are typical instances which will give readers a general idea as to how the columns of such newspaper are used :

A Gujarati daily carried in its issue of 22nd September 1975 a write-up under the name of a Government servant claiming to be a devotee of Goddess Gayatri. In brief what he says is : "The Goddess whispered in my ears secretly that in a corner of the house of one of my acquaintances K, there was some buried wealth and K should therefore go to his village and dig out the treasure. I conveyed this message to K but instead of going straightway to his village and digging out the treasure as advised by the Goddess he chose to consult a pundit who advised him to take out in the first instance some clay from the corner indicated by the Goddess and have a small cup prepared. He then performed pooja with a ghee lamp in the cup in front of the corner and then dug the ground." The Government servant does not say so specifically, but it is clear from what he says further that no wealth or hidden treasure ever came out of that corner. What he says is : "Instead of having faith in what the Goddess had conveyed K went to consult a pundit and wasted his time in performing the ritual and he therefore did not get the treasure". The more interesting part of what he writes is : "I do not like any publicity of the divine revaluations the Goddess makes to me. Nobody should therefore come to see me or write to me in connection with these spiritual matters." But at the same time he gives his full official address below his name which is nothing but an open invitation to all who may be led into the blind faith to contact the Government servant for having the benefit of the spiritual revaluations he claims to be receiving from Goddess Gayatri. It is true that

people with some intelligence would be able to judge how bogus this Government Gayatri Bhagat is. According to him, the Goddess is so crazy and whimsical that she would remove the treasure from the closed house of a man who owns it for no fault of his, but for the simple reason that he chose to perform some pooja before removing the treasure. Even then no doubt there are many simple and unintelligent people who would be misled into the trap and do anything and spend any amount to contact such devotees for their blessing and some divine hints that might bring them a big fortune. This would thus open a wide gate of making money for the so-called devotees.

Another write-up published in this paper on 26th September 1975 relates to another Government servant who is stated to have committed certain defalcations in his office and had also indulged in speculation. This had landed him in a situation where he had to face criminal prosecution and insolvency proceedings. In order to escape this, the Government servant is stated to have fled from the town of his residence leaving his wife and children to be taken care of by his in-laws who are said to be quite rich. After some years, the in-laws are stated to have consulted some astrologer who advised them to go to Kashi and search for him there. In Kashi these in-laws are stated to have met a person who always kept himself in a state of complete drunkenness. He held some human skulls that gave him all the information he sought for. This spirituous sage is stated to have advised the in-laws: "The man you seek for is in Kashi. He has just now bought some oil for preparing his roti. He is in one of the Dharamshalas in Kashi. But the skulls have forbidden me to give any information to you regarding the Dharamshala where he is." After some pressing, the drunken sage is stated to have gone back to consult the skulls and returned with the message: "You may watch for the fugitive at Kashi Vishwanath temple where you will be able to see him within a week, whereafter he has planned to leave Kashi." The fugitive Government servant is thus stated to have been traced by his in-laws keeping a close and constant watch at the Kashi Vishwanath temple. The writer calls this a really wonderful instance of guidance from the UNKNOWN. This it is stated occurred some thirty years ago. What the writer wants to suggest is that there are some spirituous saints who keep human skulls with them, are nearer to the UNKNOWN than anybody else and can tell anything that happens in this world with the help of the human skulls, more particularly when they are in a state of complete spirituous bliss. Even a slightly reasonable being can infer from what has been stated that the fugitive offender's in-laws must have had some grounds to believe that their son-in-law was hiding in Kashi. The man with the skulls must be a professional engaged in giving shelter to criminals for adequate consideration. The fugitive Government servant is not stated to have run away without any money and the shelter he received from the drunkard sage could not have been for nothing. The in-laws of the fugitive must have done everything they could for ensuring that their son-in-law was saved from prosecution on his return to his town. They must have also assured him that he was

quite safe in returning home and living with his wife and children. There is no point in painting such illegal activities in a glamorous divine colour and attributing the nefarious deals to any divine, superhuman or unknown power or even to black magic.

Columns of this type appearing in newspapers as a regular feature do a great deal of harm. Our Government has been careful enough to prohibit publication of advertisements propagating miraculous drugs, as such advertisements misguide the general public. Miraculous drugs may have at least some ingredient of medical value, may be one per cent or so, in curing some disease; but columns of the type referred to serve no purpose other than that of leading the people into blind faith and that too in a direction quite opposed to the path of virtue and right thinking.

VIEW

R. V. Pandit (IMPRINT, Dec. 1975): A Two Week Visit to Russia has contributed considerably to make me even prouder of our own achievements in agriculture and industry. We have a long way to go before our goals and dreams are even half-realised, but if what I saw in Moscow and Leningrad is representative of what the Soviets have achieved in 58 years toward enriching the human life in that country, then let me say we have not fared at all badly in that direction in the 28 years since Independence. Yes, we of course have under-nourished millions. We have hungry people. Some even die of starvation. But in India we deal with a population of nearly 600 million—100 million more than twice the size of Soviet population. And all our efforts in the 28 years were subject to the pulls and pushes of a diverse, free society.

There is shocking, and at times frightening ignorance about India and India's achievements among Soviet people. While the fact that Soviet Union buys millions of tons of food grain abroad, and further that they have recently concluded a five-year plan to buy 30 million tons of food grain from the United States, is not mentioned in Soviet Press or on the Soviet Radio, or Television, almost every citizen who reads the papers or listens to news in the Soviet Union knows that India is among recipients of Soviet wheat. Much is known of our poverty, of projects with which the Soviets are associated; but little or nothing about HMT, our atomic power plants, our consumer and durable consumer product industries, our textile industry, our fine educational institutions and above all our independent judiciary, or the many free, democratic institutions that enrich our lives. Of course, people in high government posts dealing with India have a good appreciation of the Indian reality but what they know is used strictly for dealing with India, the State, with their own interests in view. This information is completely denied to the Soviet people themselves.

On November 7, I was invited to a Russian home for dinner to cele-

brate *prashnik* (October Revolution holiday). The Russians must be among the world's most hospitable people but their fare consists of food which is unfortunately quite poorly prepared from materials which themselves are only indifferent. Anyway, the table was laden with food and drink, fruit, cakes and chocolates. Even lamb *biryani* was prepared in the visitor's honour. The host, his wife and above all his kind mother rejoiced at every tidbit consumed. After dinner, the kind lady asked me if I would like to migrate to the Soviet Union. My answer was received more in bafflement than in sorrow. While taking leave, the host tried to stuff some tobacco and cashews in my coat pocket. He was convinced I had never eaten cashews, rarely seen toffee.

I do not think that the Soviet citizen knows anything good about our living standards. Unfortunately there is nothing our Embassy in Moscow or our Government can do to correct that situation. We allow the Soviets to produce and circulate freely any number of journals in India. In USSR, they allow our Embassy to produce only one magazine about India, presently on quarterly frequency.

During the course of my two weeks stay in Russia, I met several Indians resident in Moscow. Some of the Indians I talked to need a *Bharat darshan*—a tour of our farms, our factories, our educational institutions, our hospitals and a crash course in Indian economic achievements. Provided, of course, they really are Indians.

"Here was tyranny, and in its most hated form—unlicensed power."

54. Shri B.Venkatappiah,
No. 8, Tees Janvary Marg, New Delhi 11

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